

Thursday, 6 June 2024

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon

Prime Minister
Parliament Buildings

Hon Shane Reti

Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings

Hon David Seymour

Associate Minister of Health (Pharmac)
Parliament Buildings

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers of Health,

Re: Ensuring that medicines funding for blood cancer patients will not be forgotten

As the country's alliance of blood cancer patient advocacy groups (Leukaemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand, Myeloma New Zealand, Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia Advocates New Zealand) and consultant haematologists, we were very disappointed to see that the promised \$280m for ring-fenced funding of oncology medicines was omitted from last week's Budget announcements.

While it is encouraging that you have subsequently heard the public outcry and have taken steps to confirm your commitment to delivering these solid tumour medicines for patients this year, we are writing on behalf of the 21,000 blood cancer patients in New Zealand to ensure that your pre-election promise to them is also honoured and delivered.

When announcing the '13 medicines' policy on August 21 last year, Minister Reti (then National's health spokesperson) told blood cancer patients, "*we have not forgotten you*".

"I want to give a shoutout to the non-solid [tumour] cancer sufferers – that's the people with myeloma and leukaemia [and lymphoma, among other blood cancers] – we have not forgotten you... but where we are now is that the Cancer Control Agency hasn't done the piece of work like they have done with the solid tumours, to be able to give us that guidance as to what those treatment gaps are. So again, we are sending out a signal to the people with myeloma and the people with leukaemia, we understand, we haven't forgotten you, we just need that piece of work to be done by the Cancer Control Agency"

The Cancer Control Agency's report on blood cancer medicines, referred to by Minister Reti, is now only days away, with the advice due before the end of this month.

The importance of this report on blood cancer medicines access in Aotearoa is evident from the Cancer Control Agency's prior report on solid tumour medicines, where it was noted that "*Blood cancer treatment is heavily reliant on the use of medicines, given that other non-medicine options, like surgery or radiotherapy, are often not an option. We suspect that the conclusions of this analysis (which is focused on solid tumour medicines) would be similar if not more compelling for blood cancers.*" An identical statement was made in the agency's Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Health in January.

In March, Minister Reti further reassured blood cancer patients that they would be treated equitably, stating,

“...the blood cancer medicines were not actually assessed. I would like to think that they [Pharmac and the Cancer Control Agency] might incorporate that advice as well.”

In recent days, various Ministers of the Government have given positive reassurance to the public that the Budget Day omission on cancer medicines funding will be put right and the Government will deliver on its promises with urgency. We thank you for that commitment. However, in the media furor surrounding these announcements, a re-commitment from the Government to ensure equitable progress in medicines access for blood cancer patients, alongside solid tumour patients, was unfortunately forgotten.

As you work on the details for funding and implementing the cancer medicines policy and consider the imminent blood cancer medicines report, we ask that you honour your pre-election commitment to **all** cancer patients across New Zealand – specifically including blood cancer patients – so that they are not left behind.

We thank you for your stated goal to deliver better healthcare for New Zealanders and look forward to receiving your response.

Ngā mihi nui,

On behalf of the following haematologists and blood cancer patient advocacy organisations:

Dr. Rodger Tiedemann

Antony and Margaret Morris Fellow in Cancer Research
Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Auckland
Haematologist, Auckland Hospital
Cancer and Blood Service, Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr. Ruth Spearing

Haematologist
Previous Clinical Lead Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Service
Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit
Canterbury DHB

Professor Peter Browett

Haematologist
Medical director, Leukaemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand

Haematology Society of Australia and New Zealand

Dr Annette Neylon

Haematologist/Transfusion Medicine Specialist
HSANZ Councillor for New Zealand

Tim Edmonds

Chief Executive Officer, Leukaemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand

Catherine Isaac

Trustee, Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia Advocates New Zealand

Nichola Oakenfull

Trustee, Myeloma New Zealand

Dr. Sarah Poplar

Clinical Haematologist | Kaimātai Toto
Cancer & Blood services / Te Tai Tokerau / Northern Region

Dr. Laura Chen

Haematologist
Middlemore Hospital

Dr. Sarah Hartley

Haematologist
Tauranga Hospital

Dr Fionnuala Fagan

Haematologist
Southern Blood and Cancer Service

Dr Bridgett McDiarmid

Haematologist,
Dunedin Hospital.

Dr. Samar Issa

Chair, Lymphoma Network of New Zealand
Haematologist
Middlemore Hospital
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr. Anna Ruskova

Haematologist
Clinical lead Haematology
Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Te Toka Tumai | Auckland

Dr Eileen Merriman

Clinical Director Haematology
Waitemata DHB

Dr Imogen Caldwell

Haematologist
Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Te Toka Tumai | Auckland

Dr. Clinton Lewis

Haematologist
Auckland Hospital
Te Pūriri o Te Ora | Te Toka Tumai
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr. Francisca Reed MD

Haematology Research Unit Manager
Te Whatu Ora Waitemata

Dr. Leanne Berkahn

Haematologist
Clinical Lead Haematology
Auckland Hospital

Delaine Smith

Chief Executive Officer
Australasian Leukaemia & Lymphoma Group

Dr. Suchitra Kirshnamurthy

Clinical Haematologist
Whangarei Hospital

Dr. Rory Bennett

Haematologist
Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand
Waitemata

Dr. Peter Ganly

Haematologist
Christchurch Hospital

Dr Andrew Butler

Haematologist
Canterbury Health Labs
Christchurch

Raewyn Broady

Locum Consultant Haematologist
Nelson, Marlborough

Henry Ngu

Haematologist
Auckland Hospital
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Nicole Chien

Haematologist
Auckland City Hospital

Philip George

Haematology Consultant
Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre

Dr Bart Baker
Haematologist
MidCentral DHB
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr. Jared Williams
Haematologist
Dunedin Hospital

Dr. Kathryn Forwood
Haematologist
Two Whatu Ora Southern

Dr. Anna Byrne (she/her/ia)
Consultant Haematologist
Southern Blood and Cancer Service/Te Whatu Ora – Southern

Dr. Nicola Eaddy
Haematologist
Auckland Hospital

Dr. Kern Chai,
Haematologist
Christchurch

Dr. Tom Sapsford
Clinical Haematologist
North Shore Hospital

Dr. Richard Doocey
Haematologist
Director Auckland City and Starship Hospitals Stem Cell Transplant Program

Dr. James Liang
Haematologist
Middlemore Hospital
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr Anna Elinder-Camburn
Haematologist
Te Whatu Ora Waitemata

Amelia Turnwald
Clinical Research Coordinator Team Lead
Haematology Research
Waitematā

Dr. Anup George
Consultant Haematologist
Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre

Emma-Jane McDonald

Haematologist
Christchurch Hospital

Dr Matthew Mackey

Consultant Haematologist
Waikato & Tairāwhiti

Dr. Sophie Leitch

Consultant Haematologist
Department of Haematology
North Shore Hospital

Dr. Catherine Neal

Haematologist
Christchurch Hospital

Dr. Laura Young

Haematologist
Auckland Hospital
Te Whatu Ora Health NZ

Dr. Gordon Royle

Haematologist, Middlemore Hospital
Senior lecturer, Auckland School of Medicine.

Dr. (Maria) Rhida Bautista

Consultant Haematologist
Southern Blood and Cancer Services

Dr. Helen Moore

Laboratory Haematologist
Waikato

Dr. Paul Ockelford

Clinical Haematologist
Auckland

Dr. James Campling

Consultant Haematologist
Lakes and Waikato district

Dr. Shahidul Islam

Consultant Haematologist
Waikato Hospital

Dr. Travis Perera

Haematologist, Wellington Blood and Cancer Centre, Wellington Hospital
Chair, New Zealand Haematology Research Group

Dr. Matt Wheeler

Associate Chief Medical Officer
Haematologist | Acute and General Physician

Dr. Marie Hughes

Haematologist
Te Whatu Ora, Hauora a Toi Bay of Plenty

Dr. Kirsty Marshall

Haematologist Middlemore Hospital
Cancer and Blood service, Te Whatu Ora Health NZ